

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY

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TAGS: RH, UK, PDEV

SUBJECT: RHODESIA; NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE BY JOHN
BURNS, FEBRUARY 24

HEREWITH TEXT OF NEW YORK TIMES ARTICLE: BEGIN TEXT.

"SMITH DEFENDS HIS RHODESIA PLAN, SAYS GUERRILLAS WILL
GIVE UP WAR".

PRIME MINISTER IAN D. SMITH SAID TODAY THAT IT WAS
"ABSOLUTELY NONSENSICAL" TO SUGGEST THAT SAFEGUARDS FOR
THE WHITE MINORITY IN RHODESIA INCLUDED IN HIS AGREEMENT
WITH MODERATE BLACK LEADERS COULD BE USED TO PERPETUATE
WHITE RULE.
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HE ALSO PREDICTED IN AN INTERVIEW WITH THE NEW YORK
TIMES THAT THE GUERRILLAS FIGHTING AGAINST HIM AND THE
AGREEMENT WOULD EVENTUALLY GIVE UP.

MR. SMITH, DESCRIBING THE ATTITUDE OF THE BRITISH AND
AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS AS "INCOMPREHENSIBLE," SAID THEIR
INSISTENCE ON A CONSTITUTIONAL SETTLEMENT THAT INCLUDED
THE PATRIOTIC FRONT MEANT THAT THEY HAD OPTED FOR A
"MARXIST DICTATORSHIP" INSTEAD OF A DEMOCRACY.

HE SAID, HOWEVER, THAT IT WAS "OBVIOUSLY IMPORTANT AND DESIRABLE" THAT BRITAIN AND THE UNITED STATES ACCEPT THE AGREEMENT HE REACHED WITH MODERATE BLACK LEADERS LAST WEEK.

THE PRIME MINISTER, SEATED STIFFLY IN A LEATHER SWIVEL CHAIR, RESERVED HIS STRONGEST LANGUAGE FOR LONDON AND WASHINGTON. SPOKESMEN FOR THE TWO GOVERNMENTS HAVE EXPRESSED RESERVATIONS ABOUT THE SALISBURY AGREEMENT.

"IT IS IN INCOMPREHENSIBLE TO ME", THE RHODESIAN LEADER SAID, SPEAKING SOFTLY AND WITHOUT GESTURES. "WE ARE OFFERING THEM A GENUINE SETTLEMENT TO PRODUCE A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM WHICH WILL TRULY REFLECT WHAT THEY'VE ALWAYS ASKED FOR, MAJORITY RULE, BUT THEY SEEM TO BE TURNING THEIR BACK ON THIS TOWARD A SOLUTION WHICH WILL END UP WITH A DICTATORSHIP IN RHODESIA, A MARXIST DICTATORSHIP."

ON THE CONSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT, HE DEFENDED TERMS THAT WILL GIVE WHITES 28 SEATS IN A 100-SEAT PARLIAMENT FOR AT LEAST 10 YEARS, NEARLY A THIRD OF THE SEATS FOR SLIGHTLY MORE THAN 4 PERCENT OF THE POPULATION. HE SAID UNCLASSIFIED

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THAT IT WAS "DEVIOUS" TO SUGGEST THE WHITE BLOC, WHICH WILL HAVE THE POWER TO THWART CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES THAT THREATEN PROPERTY, WILL REDUCE THE FUTURE BLACK GOVERNMENT TO A PUPPET REGIME.

"AN AGREEMENT IN WHICH 72 PERCENT OF THE PEOPLE ARE GOING TO BE BLACK RHODESIANS CAN HARDLY PUT US IN A POSITION WHERE WE ARE GOING TO HAVE SOMETHING OVER WHICH THE WHITE MAN WILL BE IN CONTROL. THIS IS ABSOLUTELY NONSENSICAL, I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT PATENTLY SO, TO ANYBODY WHO TAKES THE TROUBLE TO STUDY THE AGREEMENT WE HAVE MADE".

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT THE WHITE SAFEGUARDS, CONDEMNED BY THE PATRIOTIC FRONT AS A "SELLOUT" OF THE COUNTRY'S 6.7 MILLION BLACKS, WERE "ABSOLUTELY VITAL AND FUNDAMENTAL" TO THE COUNTRY'S FUTURE WELL-BEING, SINCE WHITES HAD THE SKILLS TO KEEP THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMY SOUND. "I DON'T BELIEVE YOU HAVE TO CONVINCE OUR BLACK PEOPLE OF THE DESIRABILITY OF RETAINING THIS," HE SAID. "MANY OF THEM HAVE VISITED COUNTRIES SURROUNDING US, AND HAVE SEEN THE APPALLING CONDITIONS, THE ABSOLUTE CHAOS, WHICH NOW REIGNS."

"IN FACT", HE ADDED, "IT COULD BE EVEN MORE SERIOUS, BECAUSE THIS COUNTRY IS SPLIT BETWEEN THE BLACK PEOPLE,

AND THERE IS A VERY GOOD CHANCE THAT THERE COULD BE

CIVIL WAR IN RHODESIA IF THE WHITE MAN WAS REMOVED FROM THE SCENE. NOTHING IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN RETAINING THE CONFIDENCE OF THE WHITES, UNLESS YOU WANT RHODESIA TO GO THE SAME WAY AS COUNTRIES LIKE ANGOLA AND MOZAMBIQUE."

SMITH APPEARS STRAINED

DURING THE 40-MINUTE INTERVIEW, WHICH WAS CONDUCTED IN UNCLASSIFIED

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THE PRIME MINISTER'S SIMPLY FURNISHED OFFICE IN THE MILTON BUILDING, THE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTER OF THE RHODESIAN GOVERNMENT, THE 58-YEAR-OLD LEADER APPEARED TIRED AND SOMEWHAT STRAINED. HE RARELY SMILED, AND SAID HE WAS LOOKING FORWARD TO GETTING OUT OF POLITICS AS SOON AS A BLACK GOVERNMENT WAS INSTALLED.

"CERTAINLY, IT IS MY INTENTION TO PULL OUT OF POLITICS," HE SAID, ADDING THAT HE WOULD RETURN TO THE CATTLE RANCH THAT HE LEFT WHEN HE BECAME PRIME MINISTER 14 YEARS AGO. "I HAVE HAD A GOOD INNINGS, AND I THINK IT'S ENOUGH," HE SAID, USING A CRICKET TERM.

THE DISCUSSION CAME DURING A FOUR-DAY ADJOURNMENT IN THE SETTLEMENT TALKS, WHICH HAVE BOGGED DOWN OVER ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE TRANSITIONAL PERIOD BETWEEN WHITE AND BLACK RULE. THE PARTICIPANTS TURNED TO THE COMPOSITION OF THE TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATION AFTER REACHING AGREEMENT ON THE CONSTITUTION UNDER WHICH BLACKS WILL TAKE POWER.

RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS IMPASSE

MR. SMITH WAS RELUCTANT TO DISCUSS THE IMPASSE OVER THE TRANSITION, WHICH DEVELOPED WHEN THE BLACK LEADERS DEMANDED THREE-QUARTERS OF THE POSTS IN THE INTERIM GOVERNMENT AND MR. SMITH COUNTERED WITH A PLAN UNDER WHICH WHITES AND BLACKS WOULD HAVE AN EQUAL NUMBER OF POSTS, WITH MR. SMITH IN OVERALL CONTROL. THE TRANSITION PERIOD BEFORE THE ELECTIONS IS EXPECTED TO LAST AT LEAST A YEAR.

HOWEVER, THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT CRITICS WHO CHARGED THAT HIS PLAN SHOWED HE WAS SEEKING WAYS TO PROLONG UNCLASSIFIED

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WHITE RULE WERE "INDULGING IN A GUESSING GAME" WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT THE FINAL FORM OF THE TRANSITIONAL ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE. PRIVATELY, BOTH SIDES IN THE NEGOTIATIONS HAVE FORECAST A COMPROMISE, POSSIBLY WITHIN TWO WEEKS.

THE OBSERVATION WAS FOLLOWED BY A HINT THAT MR. SMITH MIGHT SHIFT HIS POSITION SIGNIFICANTLY, GIVING BLACKS GREATER AUTHORITY IN THE PERIOD BEFORE MAJORITY RULE. "THE DETAILS ARE STILL BEING NEGOTIATED, SO I'M NOT PREPARED TO SAY WHAT THEY WILL BE," HE SAID. "BUT CLEARLY THERE IS GOING TO BE A BIG SHIFT IN POWER."

IN RESPONSE TO SUGGESTIONS THAT SKEPTICISM ABOUT HIS INTENTIONS STEMS FROM HIS RECORD AS THE MAN WHO LED RHODESIA TO BREAK WITH BRITAIN IN 1965 RATHER THAN COMMIT THE COUNTRY TO EVENTUAL MAJORITY RULE, AND VOWED LATER NOT TO YIELD TO BLACK GOVERNMENT IN HIS LIFETIME, MR. SMITH SHOT BACK: "DON'T LET ME PRETEND THAT I WELCOME THIS, THAT I WANTED THIS. UNFORTUNATELY, I HAVE NO OPTION."

KISSINGER MEETING RECALLED

HE RECALLED THAT HIS ORIGINAL COMMITMENT TO MAJORITY RULE FOLLOWED A MEETING IN PRETORIA 17 MONTHS AGO WITH SECRETARY OF STATE HENRY A. KISSINGER. AT THAT MEETING IT HAD BEEN MADE CLEAR THAT "EVEN OUR FRIENDS IN THIS WORLD" - MEANING SOUTH AFRICA - WOULD ABANDON RHODESIA UNLESS THE UNDERTAKING TO TRANSFER POWER WAS GIVEN, AND THAT THE PRESSURES ON THE COUNTRY, ECONOMIC AS WELL AS MILITARY, WOULD BE STEPPED UP.

"HAVING MADE AN AGREEMENT, WE MUST ABIDE BY IT," THE PRIME MINISTER SAID. "I DON'T THINK WE COULD GO BACK ON IT. IF WE DID, THEN WE WOULD BE REJECTED BY EVERYBODY, UNCLASSIFIED

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EVEN OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS WOULD TURN AGAINST US. YOU CAN'T MAKE AN AGREEMENT AND GO BACK ON IT, THAT WOULD BE THE SUREST WAY OF COMMITTING SUICIDE."

MR. SMITH SAID THAT THE BLACK LEADERS INVOLVED IN THE SALISBURY TALKS, BISHOP ABEL MUZOREWA, REV. NDABANINGI SITHOLE AND SENATOR JEREMIAH CHIRAU, WERE "SENSIBLE AND PRAGMATIC" MEN WHO ENJOYED THE SUPPORT OF "THE VAST MASS OF THE PEOPLE." BY CONTRAST, HE SAID, THE PATRIOTIC FRONT LEADERS, ROBERT MUGABE AND JOSHUA NKOMO, HAD LITTLE SUPPORT AND WHAT THEY HAD WAS SLIPPING.

MUGABE'S BACKING CALLED NIL

"THERE WAS A TIME WHEN I WAS RECEIVING ASSESSMENTS THAT THE PATRIOTIC FRONT HAD THE SUPPORT OF UP TO ABOUT 17 PERCENT OF THE BLACK PEOPLE, BUT GRADUALLY IT HAS COME DOWN, TO 5 PERCENT AND BELOW," HE SAID. "I'M TOLD THAT

IT PROBABLY ISN'T MUCH MORE THAN ABOUT 10 PERCENT, AND THIS IS EXCLUSIVELY FOR NKOMO. MUGABE HAS NOT GOT ANY SUPPORT."

THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT HIS CONDITION FOR THE PATRIOTIC FRONT LEADERS TO JOIN THE CONSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT REMAINED UNCHANGED, THAT THEY MUST FIRST FORSAKE THE GUERRILLA WAR. "THEY'VE GOT TO MAKE UP THEIR MINDS," HE SAID. THEY CAN'T HAVE A FOOT IN BOTH CAMPS, CONTINUE TO FIGHT ON THE ONE HAND AND NEGOTIATE CONSTITUTIONALLY WITH THE OTHER. THIS WOULD BE A RIDICULOUS POSITION."

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REPORTS THAT HE WAS NEGOTIATING FOR MR. NKOMO'S RETURN WERE FALSE, MR. SMITH ADDED, AND IN ANY EVENT THE PROSPECT OF THE LONGTIME NATIONALIST'S RETURNING WAS OF LITTLE IMPORTANCE TO HIM. "HIS SUPPORT IS GROWING LESS WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME, SO IF HE DOESN'T COME BACK, I BELIEVE IN TIME HE WILL WITHER AWAY," MR. SMITH SAID.

THE PRIME MINISTER FORECAST THAT THE GUERRILLAS, IN SEPARATE ARMIES LOYAL TO THE PATRIOTIC FRONT'S CO-LEADERS, WOULD LOSE THE WILL TO FIGHT ONCE A BLACK GOVERNMENT WAS INSTALLED UNDER THE NEW AGREEMENT. "THIS IS OUR ASSESSMENT, AND IT HAPPENS ALSO TO BE THE ASSESSMENT OF THE INTERNAL BLACK LEADERS WITH WHOM WE ARE NOW TALKING," HE SAID.

U.S. HAS RESERVATIONS

WASHINGTON, FEB. 23 - ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS SAID TODAY THAT THE UNITED STATES HAD ADOPTED A WAIT-AND-SEE ATTITUDE ON RHODESIA IN LIGHT OF STILL-UNCOMPLETED NEGOTIATIONS ON THE FUTURE OF THAT COUNTRY, OTHER HOME-FRONT POLITICAL FACTORS AND BRITAIN'S ROLE IN A SETTLEMENT.

YESTERDAY THE STATE DEPARTMENT SAID THAT, TO THE EXTENT THAT THE AGREEMENT IN SALISBURY BETWEEN THE WHITE GOVERNMENT AND THREE BLACK LEADERS WOULD HASTEN THE END OF WHITE MINORITY DOMINATION OF THE POLITICAL PROCESS, "IT IS A SIGNIFICANT STEP."

ONE REASON THE STATE DEPARTMENT ISSUED YESTERDAY WHAT APPEARED TO BE A SOMEWHAT MORE POSITIVE ASSESSMENT OF THE PARTIAL SALISBURY AGREEMENT, OFFICIALS SAID, WAS THAT THE UNITED STATES DID NOT WISH TO SEEM OUT OF STEP WITH BRITAIN.

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,HE STATE DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCEMENT, OFFICIALS SAID, WAS
DESIGNED TO RESTORE THE ADMINISTRATION TO A MORE DETACHED
POSITION THAN THE ONE IN WHICH IT HAD BEEN PLACED BY A
STATEMENT OF ANDREW YOUNG, THE UNITED STATES DELEGATE TO
THE UNITED NATIONS, THAT ACCEPTANCE OF THE INTERNAL
SETTLEMENT WOULD RISK "A BLACK ON BLACK CIVIL WAR."

MOST ADMINISTRATION SPECIALISTS ON SOUTHERN AFRICA SAY
THEY DOUBT THAT A SOLUTION CAN ENDURE IF IT EXCLUDES
LEADERS OF THE PATRIOTIC FRONT, WHICH HAS CONDUCTED A
GUERRILLA WAR AGAINST THE WHITE RHODESIAN GOVERNMENT
FROM BASES IN MOZAMBIQUE AND ZAMBIA. END TEXT. VANCE

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